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Americans Unsympathetic toward 'Getting Ahead at any Cost'

PRINCETON, N.J. — Americans tend to be unsympathetic toward notions of getting ahead at any cost, although many are tempted to follow this course of action. Solid majorities of adults believe "yuppies" (57%) and "stock brokers" (59%) are losing favor and popularity among their friends and acquaintances. Moreover, the vast majority of Americans (80%) believe that people in big business and Wall Street, today, seem more greedy than they did five years ago. These views and attitudes about a get-ahead-at-any-cost culture are held by all age groups. These results are from the NEWSWEEK Poll, conducted by telephone by The Gallup Organization with 606 adults 18 or older on December 16 and 17, 1987. (The margin of error expected from a sample of this size is 5 percentage points.)

Staying at Home Has Growing Appeal

With the end of the 1980s drawing near, America appears to be turning back to the hearth. Americans, today, are almost three times more likely than they were in June of 1986 to say "staying home with family" is their favorite way of spending an evening (36% vs. 13%). Results from the current survey indicate that persons 30 to 49 years of age (46%), a group consisting mainly of aging baby boomers, are more likely than those age 18 to 29 (33%) or age 50 or over (29%) to mention staying at home as a favorite way to spend an evening. Moreover, in a companion question, the majority of all adults say staying home instead of going out (70%) and spending more time with one's children (65%) is gaining favor and popularity among friends and acquaintances. Similarly, a solid majority (60%) of adults say having a happy family life is more important to them now than it was five years ago.

Having Children Still Included in Ideal Lifestyle

The large majority of all Americans (80%) include having children in their description of an interesting and satisfying lifestyle. While women also want to work outside the home, part-time arrangements are more popular than a full-time career. Among women, 33% believe that having children and working part-time would be an ideal living arrangement, while 17% believe having children and working full-time would be ideal. Twenty-nine percent of all women would prefer to have children and not work a full or part-time job. Only 13% of all women say, outright, that the most satisfying and interesting lifestyle for them does not include children.

Speech given by George Gallup, Jr. at the symposium, CONFRONTING SECULARISM, sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Inc. and St. Peter's College, Dinneen Theater, December 2, 1987.

Secularism and Religion: Trends in Contemporary America

It is a pleasure and honor for me to participate in today's program, CONFRONTING SECULARISM. The title of my talk is "Secularism and Religion Trends in Contemporary America."

We are confronted in America today with a paradox: religion is gaining ground, but morality is losing ground.

America is, on the surface at least, one of the most religious nations in the entire world, yet in terms of ethical behavior (witness our blue-collar and white-collar crime rates, child abuse, neglect of the poor and homeless, etc.) we may be one of the least ethical.

Speaking about the Christian populace in the U.S., Anglican Bishop Michael Marshall writes that many people have accepted a "decaffeinated Christianity — it promises not to keep you awake at night!"

The key question facing society today in terms of the impact of religion is this: is religion shaping society, or is society shaping religion?

Which is winning out — religion or culture? Is religion really penetrating our lives in a deep way?

It is easy to be pessimistic:

"Blessed are the peacemakers," said Jesus, but we ask how long it will be before men and women come to realize that God can solve our problems, that he can give us hearts to care about one another and make us want peace? How long will it be before unconditional love among people will be the norm rather than the exception?

One fears that it may be far into the future. First, nations are at war with each other. One estimate is that there are four million soldiers fighting in 40 wars around the globe.

Second, we are at war with each other in our own societies, with crime sweeping the world. And the U.S. has one of the worse records for crime of the developed nations of the world.

And third, we are at war within ourselves. In one survey we discovered that at least one-third of Americans have a low sense of self-worth, which is closely related to a host of social ills. People who do not believe they are lovable often find that they are incapable of loving others.

There would seem to be ample survey evidence to support the views of C.C. Colton who wrote:

"Men will wrangle for religion; write for it; fight for it; die for it; anything but live for it."

It is easy to be pessimistic, yet there is, I believe, cause for some optimism. Americans, stunned by revelations on Wall Street, in the television ministries, and in Washington, show a new interest in morality and ethics, in what is right and what is wrong.

I believe there is much to what President Jimmy Carter said recently in a speech during the Bi-Centennial Celebration in Princeton, New Jersey — that there is a growing public demand "for a corrective of absolute truth." He also said: "The morality issue is becoming a matter of transcendental importance."

Is corruption still the exception, or has it become the rule? This is a question each of us is asking. Ethics has become a topic of national debate.

The insider trading scandal, clandestine sexual exploits and plagarism on the part of presidential candidates, the evasive behavior revealed in the Iran-contra hearings, the sexual and financial scandals of TV evangelists — these headlined events, and many more, cause us to ask:

- Is America wallowing in a moral morass? Is the nation in a values vacuum?
- What is the evidence that this is the case?
- And if there is an ethical decline, why is this the case?
- What can be done?

These are the questions we are all asking — and these are the questions I shall attempt to answer, based on numerous surveys of the American people.

I do so with trepidation, because every period in American history has been characterized by both high and low moral standards, of great generosity and of great greed, of heroic examples of the human spirit, and of horrible examples of cruelty, immorality, hypocrisy, avarice, and insensitivity.

Yet one cannot examine survey findings today on the attitudes and behavior of the population without becoming deeply concerned, if not alarmed.

It is my view, as a survey researcher, that we are facing in this nation a moral crisis of the first dimension, and for a variety of reasons which I shall discuss later. The great problems of our time, I believe, are moral and spiritual rather than political and economic.

Today's guru is Alan Bloom with his best-selling book, *The Closing of the American Mind*. Bloom notes the rise of prominence of a "new language of value relativism" that effectively prevents us from "talking with any conviction about good and evil."

"Yet," writes Bloom, "Americans long for something lost — the great moral truths on which civilization rests." Bloom is sharply critical of the universities, and the family as well. He writes about the family: "The dreariness of the family's spiritual landscape passes belief. Neither the Bible nor anything else forms a spiritual/intellectual fount in the home. People sup together, play together, travel together, but they do not think together."

Bloom also writes that the eternal conflict between good and evil has been replaced with "I'm okay, you're okay."

The French philosopher Blaise Pascal said that man should seek guidance and redemption outside himself: "It is vain, O man, that you seek within yourself the cure for your miseries. All your insight only leads you to the knowledge that it is not in yourselves that you will discover the true and the good."

Many observers of the American scene ask what has become of the notion of "sin." In an article in *The New York Times Magazine*, William F. Buckley wrote, "The rediscovery of sin would cause us to look up and note the infinite horizons that beckon us toward better conduct, better lives, nobler visions."

Let us now examine the attitudes of Americans today. By a large margin the U.S. public believes that ethics and standards of honesty are getting worse. This is a view held by all age groups and in each socio-economic level. Large majorities also hold this view about business executives and fifty-one percent of the public believes that almost all or quite a few of the people running the governments of their states are dishonest or crooked.

The public also does not give very high marks to people in most of the 24 occupations tested in a Gallup Poll in terms of honesty and ethical standards. Here is the full list, with the percentages who say the honesty and ethical standards are very high or high:

Honesty and Ethical Standards

	%
Clergymen	64
Druggists, pharmacists	61
Medical doctors	53
Dentists	51
College teachers	47
Engineers	46
Policemen	42
Bankers	38
TV reporters, commentators	33
Funeral directors	29
Newspaper reporters	26
Lawyers	24
Stockbrokers	19
Business executives	18
Senators	17
Building contractors	17
Local political officeholders	16
Congressmen	14
Realtors	13
State political officeholders	13
Insurance salesmen	13
Labor union leaders	12
Advertising practitioners	8
Car salesmen	6

Let's now turn from attitudes and perceptions to measurements of actual behavior, perhaps a better indicator of the state of ethics in the populace:

Two-thirds of teenagers say there is either a great deal or a fair amount of cheating going on in their schools. This we learned from a recent Gallup Youth Survey.

- 59% of teens admit to having cheated on a test or exam. This figure rises to 73% among teen-agers 16 to 17 years old.
- The California Poll recently found that the public believes that there is an increasing trend in public dishonesty. And supporting this view is the number of different ways in which individuals themselves confess to being less than honest. In four out of the nine items tested, more than 40% of the public admit to being dishonest. These include: calling in sick to work when not ill, receiving more money in change and not giving it back, taking home work supplies for their own personal use, and cheating on an exam or test while in school or college.

Omniously, in terms of the future, younger adults, (18-29) admit to dishonest acts with much greater frequency than older persons, 50 and older. In many cases twice as many younger adults admit to being dishonest as older people.

- In a Roper survey conducted for *U.S. News and World Report* it was found that one-third of adults 18-29 feel "there are some circumstances in which stealing from an employer is justified." Three in 10 of this group admit to "padding an expense account," and one-fourth admit to "lying to their boss or colleagues."

At all levels of society we are seeing the corrupting power of material success. It appears that, as someone put it, "cheating has become a national pastime."

Here are some further examples:

- About $100 billion a year is lost through tax cheating. If this could be recovered, we could cut our deficit dramatically.
- Fraudulent telephone charges cost millions annually.
- Department stores lose more than $4 billion a year from pilferage.
- About one student in seven has defaulted on federal education loans.

Let's turn to the business community, based on surveys we conducted for the Wall Street Journal:

Business executives themselves report considerable exposure to unethical pressures and temptations. Nearly four in 10 say superiors at some point have asked them to do something they considered unethical. One in 10 says a superior has asked him to commit an act that the executive thought was illegal. Some 47% say they have dismissed at least one subordinate for unethical behavior. About 18% say suppliers have approached them personally for kickbacks. Younger Americans consistently indicate that they are more likely to take the unethical path than their elders.

Church attendance, it appears, makes little difference in people's ethical views and behavior with respect to lying, cheating, pilferage, and not reporting theft. These findings will come as a shock to religious leaders and others, and underscore the need for religious educators and the clergy to channel religious interest in America not simply into religious involvement, but deep spiritual commitment, because it is at the level of deep commitment where real changes in behavior seem to occur.

We have been shocked by recent insider trader scandals on Wall Street — crimes not of violence, but of broken trust. A recent article in *Christianity Today*, written by Terry Muck, notes:

"Tighter laws are proposed — existing restrictions are inadequate to control the burgeoning corporate raiding business. Yet increased legislation has never successfully dealt with ethical problems. Insider trader deals are a symptom of an increasingly dangerous situation that continues to sap the moral strength of our business community. It is a symptom of the creeping individualism and lack of accountability that has made business dealing in our country an amoral, long-distance exchange between computers.

When ethics and lack of accountability are missing,

money becomes the standard by which we measure a transaction's goodness.

"Money as we all know has always been a mixed blessing. Only rarely do we see human beings, when tempted with the prospect of great riches, rise above the level of basic greed."

Muck further notes:

"In our society money buys all. We can buy clothes by mail, jewelry by computer, food by phone, land by proxy. Gone is the sense of community involvement in business transactions that act as a natural curb on excess, with fewer and fewer chances to factor human decency into transactions."

We find unethical behavior in many sectors of society. The situation on college campuses is particularly worrisome, because students will become our future leaders. In the desperate effort to make good grades and to make money, ethics and values seem to be going by the boards. Dr. James Billington, former Director of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, said in an interview in *U.S. News and World Report*:

> "To a very large extent, American universities have fallen down on the job of transmitting values to students. Other institutions are also falling short, but for the universities failure is especially serious, because historically they have had the task of imparting the essentials of the Western tradition to the leaders of tomorrow. Now young people in the universities are generally offered a smorgasbord curriculum that fails to convey any sense of their heritage."

Syndicated columnist, William Raspberry, also deplores value-free education, but notes an optimistic trend:

"Now, at long last, the current crop of educators is starting to learn the obvious: value-free education is a contradiction in terms."

He continues: "Many educators — perhaps even the majority — still imagine that their students will soak up, as through osmosis, a clear sense of right and wrong, and that, in any case, morality is not their responsibility."

Quoting Raspberry again:

"In our zeal to get religion out of the classroom we threw out morality as well."

Former Supreme Court Justice Warren Burger said, "We have virtually eliminated from the public schools any effort to teach values of integrity, truth, personal accountability and respect for others' rights."

At last the nation is talking about teaching values in schools. I pleaded for such courses in speeches as long ago as a quarter-century, but some educators at the time scoffed. For the American parents themselves, however, such courses are an idea whose time is long overdue. More than 60% in a recent Gallup survey of parents whose children attend public schools are in favor of having their youngsters taught courses on values and ethical behavior — and seven in 10 believe it is possible to develop subject matter for such courses that is acceptable to most people in the community, according to a Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll on education.

On the occasions that I have urged such courses in schools, the criticism is sometimes raised: "Whose values would be taught?" This has always seemed to me to be a strange question. Aren't most people agreed that honesty, selflessness, kindness, responsibility, positive, non-destructive behavior, and respect for each other are desirable traits?

Such courses, I think you will agree, should not be narrow and moralistic in tone, but impart the spirit of goodness. Natalia Ginzburg in her book, *The Little Virtues*, writes:

"As far as the education of children is concerned, I think they should be taught not the little virtures, but the great ones. Not thrift but generosity and an indifference to money; not caution but courage and contempt for danger; not shrewdness but frankness and a love of truth; not tact instead of love for one's neighbor and self-denial; not a desire for success but a desire to be and to know."

Look at what value-free education has brought in the 1980s — record levels of teen suicide, homicide, drug and alcohol abuse, vandalism, and teen-age pregnancies.

There are, of course, other factors involved in these problems — one's home, the disease of alcoholism, and others — but certainly the problems we see are to a considerable degree correctible, if values are taught, and particularly if teachers work with parents in a team effort.

Why do we seem to be suffering a decline in morality and ethics in our nation? From a religious point of view, why is faith not changing society? Columnist Michael McManus has noted: "If religion does not produce a more ethical, loving society, something is fundamentally wrong with the way that religion is being practiced."

There are undoubtedly many reasons for the decline in ethics:

1. In the business community, excessive individualism, without the checks and balances of human contact;
2. In the political world, the need for candidates to raise staggering sums of money to get into office, and to stay there.
3. Various rationalizations — "everyone is doing it," "they'll never miss it," "it's owed me."
4. An emphasis on *having* rather than *being*.
5. A watering down of the doctrine of sin, value neutrality, a loss of sense of right and wrong. Truth has become relative.

The churches of our nation have not always been helpful on this matter, and some have been captured by the culture. Sin is not talked about in some churches, or at least played down. Without the humble admission of sin on the part of individuals, there is little need for a forgiving God. I'm sure you will agree that it would not be right for churches to concentrate only on an angry God of judgment and retribution, but without an acknowledgement of the existence of sin in the individual, what role does a loving, forgiving God play? God, in this respect, becomes expendable.

Anglican Bishop Michael Marshall writes that the "central problem of contemporary Christianity in America is that many people have settled for a fascimile of Christian freedom: running their own lives while at the same time saying they believe in Christ." We want the fruits of faith, but not the obligations.

For the ethical decline in our nation — and I think we would have to conclude that the situation has gotten worse, not better — one can point the finger of blame at the home — for not dealing with values, for allowing the most dangerous sin of all, gossip, to flourish; at the schools for retreating from the teaching of values; at big business, for their cavalier

attitude toward consumers; at the movie industry for painting a negative and distorted picture of reality (the movie industry has the potential for bringing great good into the world). And certainly television has a long way to go to be socially responsible.

Charles Colson, head of Prison Ministries, a man whom I admire greatly, not only for what he writes, but for what he does in the name of Christ, has this to say:

"Where is our sense of outrage? Perhaps our moral sensibilities have been dulled because of today's dazzling communications. We sit mesmerized in front of our TVs, unable to turn off the set, so we turn off our minds instead.

"Over time, so much trash is heaped upon us that we come to expect and accept it; the bizarre becomes commonplace. Morally exhausted, we lose our capacity to discern good from evil."

What steps seem indicated to stem the tide of immorality, which may increase as our world grows more impersonal? Here are some suggested ways — and these are ways in which each of us can be involved:

1. Press for changing the electoral process so that it will give us a much wider choice of men and women than it presently does.
2. Find out to what extent values are being taught in the schools in your area.
3. Monitor the TV viewing habits of your children.
4. Encourage a discussion of values in the home. Eliminate gossip, which is as damaging to other people as a bullet. Insist on honesty in small matters as well as large.
5. Do not cheat or fudge on your income taxes; don't be part of the one-fourth of the populace that does.
6. And most importantly, in my view, bring the Bible into your lives on a regular daily basis. Also, encourage schools to bring the Bible into the curriculum, in constitutionally permissable ways, which include elective Bible study courses, use of the Bible in literature, history and social studies classes, in comparative religion courses, and making school facilities available for use by student religious groups during non-school hours.

Although Americans claim to believe the Bible is the Word of God, either literal or inspired, and even though many prize the Bible as the basis for our laws and the source of our sense of justice and charity, few of us read the Bible. As columnist Jim Castelli writes, "We revere the Bible, but we don't read it."

The result is that we have become a nation of biblical illiterates. Eight in 10 adults, for example, say they are Christians but only 4 in 10 know that Jesus, according to the Bible, delivered the Sermon on the Mount. A large majority believe the Ten Commandments to be valid rules for living today, but they have a tough time recalling exactly what those rules are.

We must look for our values and ethics and moral standards outside ourselves, in God. The Founding Fathers recognized this in writing the Declaration of Independence. It was their answer two centuries ago, and it is our answer today.

I have bombarded you with a lot of grim statistics today. I'm sure I remind you of the British diplomat who cabled back from Africa — "The gravity of the situation is impossible to exaggerate, but I'll try."

There is, of course, much that is good about America, and we note these encouraging trends:

1. A renewed search for values.
2. A renewed search for depth in our spiritual life, arising out of frustration with the material world and concern over the many problems afflicting our society, and a desire for a recovery of eternal truths; and
3. A renewed search for relationships, arising out of loneliness and the feeling of being disconnected with the rest of society. This renewed search for relationships — this new interest in bonding — is reflected in the growth of self-help groups that are springing up all over the country — people meeting together, who share a particular medical, emotional, or social problem.

In the religious world, the counterpart is the growth in Bible study and prayer fellowship groups. People are discovering, or rediscovering, that "faith grows best in the presence of faith." This new interest in Bible study and prayer fellowship is, in my view, the most hopeful trend in America today.

And certainly one of the most heartening trends is the capacity Americans have for change and renewal — there appears to be a self-correcting mechanism operating in our nation. And finally, there are three traits of Americans that offer us, I believe, still further cause for optimism about the future:

1. Our devotion to education. Developing the best educational system in the world is the key to America's future strength, a large and growing number of citizens believe — more important than having the most efficient industrial production system or the strongest military force.
2. Deep spiritual commitment on the part of at least some of our citizens. This is a commitment that causes them to be more outreaching, more concerned about families and the betterment of society, more involved in charitable activities, more tolerant of others, and far happier.

And finally,

3. Volunteerism. Despite continued high mobility, the growing number of women in the work force, and reports that Americans are increasingly materialist and less interested in the welfare of their fellow human beings, the level of volunteerism in this nation continues to grow — persons who are involved in person to person work among the poor, the infirm, the elderly and the handicapped.

The current percent is close to 40%, representing a steady rise over the last decade. Volunteerism — an American trait — may certainly be one of our best hopes for the future.

Are Americans facing a grim future as the world moves toward the year 2,000? From my perspective as a pollster, I would venture to say we are not. The positive forces of underlying moral and spiritual values, broad public education, and volunteerism run deep. They make me optimistic in the long run about our prospects.

In fact, most Americans today, I'm certain, would readily agree that the best years of our nation are yet to come.

New Book Paints Surprising Portrait of American Catholics

- Catholics say by a 3 to 1 margin that "divorced Catholics should be allowed to remain in the Church."
- Support for a married priesthood is quite strong among Catholics (who accept it by a 2-to-1 margin).
- While Catholics are "conservative" on some key social issues, they clearly come down on the "liberal" side of other key social issues — most notably women's rights, gun control, and civil rights for minorities and homosexuals.

These are among the provocative findings in *The American Catholic People*, written by George Gallup, Jr. and Jim Castelli and published by Doubleday. Drawn from The Gallup Organization's data base, the book provides eye-opening insights into the 28% of American adults who identify themselves as Catholics

Who are the American Catholics? Twenty-nine percent are under the age of 30; 16% are Hispanic, while 3% are black and another 3% classify themselves as non-white. Sixty-eight percent are parents; three out of four live in urban areas; and 55% identify themselves as politically right-of-center.

Gallup and Castelli compare this growing and increasingly influential population to the Protestant majority on a number of vital issues. They find that Catholics are more liberal than Protestants in their stance on the cutting of the defense budget and on the allocation of funds for social programs. Catholics will also be a major force for reduced military spending, moderation in foreign policy, and progress in the control of nuclear arms.

The American Catholic People: Their Beliefs, Practices, and Values. George Gallup, Jr. & Jim Castelli. February 20, 1987. $15.95 (Hardcover). Doubleday and Company, Inc., 245 Park Ave., New York, NY 10167. Contact: Diane Speicher (212) 984-7096

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